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TAGS: PREL PBTS IR YE OA

SUBJECT: IRANIAN AMBASSADOR ANNOUNCES DEAL ON MARITIME BORDER; SHAYKH TAMIM TO VISIT TEHRAN

REF: A. 2009 DOHA 493

¶B. 2009 DOHA 538

¶C. 2009 DOHA 442

Classified By: CDA Mirembe L. Nantongo for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

(SBU) KEY POINTS

-- At a widely covered press conference on January 6, Iranian Ambassador to Qatar Abdulla Sohrabi announced that his government had reached an agreement with Qatar on the demarcation of their maritime border. This was confirmed on February 1 by MFA North America desk officer Shaykh Ali Al Thani.

-- Ambassador Sohrabi announced on January 31 that Heir Apparent Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani would visit Tehran on February 2, and hinted that signing the border agreement would be on his agenda there.

-- At his January 6 press conference, Sohrabi also said that the Iranian Defense Minister would visit Doha "soon" to sign an agreement on military cooperation. Other cooperative agreements in the fields of education and justice are also under discussion, he said.

(C) COMMENTS

-- Ambassador Sohrabi's announcements concerning the demarcation of the maritime border and enhanced maritime security cooperation, if true, underscores yet again that Qatar values a close and stable relationship with Iran as vital to its natural interests, given that the neighboring countries share a vast natural gas field located beneath the Gulf.

-- Crown Prince Tamim's visit has been expected for some time, and is the latest in a series of high-level exchanges between the two governments (reftels).

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (SBU) At a January 6 press conference widely reported in local English and Arabic news outlets, Iranian Ambassador to Qatar Abdulla Sohrabi announced that Iran and Qatar had reached an "initial agreement" on the demarcation of their maritime border. He noted that Iran recently reached a similar agreement with Bahrain, and that while the Qatari accord was still subject to approval by the two governments, he saw no obstacles to its ratification.

¶2. (C) In a February 1 conversation with P/E Chief Rice, MFA North America desk officer Shaykh Ali Al Thani confirmed the

announcement, adding that senior Qatari officials had discussed the matter with their U.S. counterparts at meetings he attended with them in Washington last autumn (Note: Both MFA Assistant Minister for Follow-Up Affairs Mohamad Al-Rumaihi and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al-Mahmoud visited Washington separately last autumn). MFA has not publicly commented on Ambassador Sohrabi's statement, however. The sensitivity of the Iranian border issue was confirmed by MFA Director for Asian and African Affairs Zayed Al-Noemi in a January 7 conversation with Poloff Caudill in which Al-Noemi said that he was unaware of the details of the agreement, since the matter was being handled by a special committee led by Assistant Minister Al-Rumaihi.

¶3. (C) The Iranian Ambassador also announced January 31 that Heir Apparent Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani would visit Tehran on February 2, and hinted that signing the border agreement would be on the Heir Apparent's agenda. He previously disclosed on January 6 that his government and the GOQ were close to signing a number of agreements on matters ranging from education to the military cooperation. These announcements by the Iranian Ambassador came in the wake of a surge in high level visits and contacts between the two Gulf countries (Ref B).

¶4. (C) Qatar will also host Iranian Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Mustafa Muhammad-Najjar "soon", said the Iranian Ambassador on January 6. He noted that the visit had been scheduled to take place in December, but was postponed due to Qatar's National Day (December 18). According to Ambassador Sohrabi, Muhammad-Najjar and Qatari Armed forces Chief of Staff MG Hamad Bin Ali Al-Attiyah will sign an agreement on cooperation between land and maritime

forces, to include technical exchanges. MG Al-Attiyah made a similar visit to Tehran in July where he laid the groundwork for future cooperation (Ref C).

¶5. (SBU) In addition to these announcements, Ambassador Sohrabi stated on January 6 that discussions are underway between his government and the GOQ on educational cooperation, and that he expects an agreement to be reached soon on the extradition of accused criminals and on other matters of judicial cooperation. He added that Qatari Diar is exploring investment opportunities in Iran.
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